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October 30, 2017

The Honorable Rick Scott  
Governor, State of Florida  
400 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor Scott,

We want to thank you for your administration's willingness to submit waiver requests to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to facilitate the provision of food assistance during natural disasters. These timely requests that have been approved by the USDA have ensured that millions of Floridians do not have to worry about the most basic of needs—nourishment and nutrition—as they rebuild their homes, search for jobs, accommodate displaced family members, and respond to this unfortunate catastrophe.

As state and federal actors continue to aid in relief, we ask that you consider the economic implications of Hurricane Irma on the State of Florida. By seeking a waiver from the USDA to temporarily lift the three-month time limit for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients in areas most economically affected by Hurricane Irma—your administration will adequately continue to respond to need and deprivation.

The United States Department of Labor (DOL) [attributed](#) the loss of over thirty thousand nationwide jobs to “[a] steep decline in food services and drinking places and below-trend growth in some industries [that] likely reflected the impact of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in September.” This report speaks to the negative effect that natural disasters can have on the livelihood and job prospects of our constituents. DOL found that almost 600,000 establishments with just over 7.6 million employees were in the 48 FEMA declared disaster counties throughout the State of Florida. These numbers are unsettling.

More disconcerting, however, is the fact that a vast majority of these job losses come from areas where Florida's economy thrives: food service, hospitality, and tourism. Per the [Visit Florida Research Department](#), Florida is the top travel destination in the world; direct tourism spending in the state accounted for \$108 billion in the Florida economy, while accommodating 112 million worldwide visitors between 2015 and 2016. The Floridians who play an integral role in achieving these feats, unfortunately, are often employed in jobs that pay low wages. Retail salespersons, food preparation and service workers, tour guides, maid and housecleaners, stock clerks, and cashiers—all comprise a demographic who often barely make ends meet, and regrettably, suffer the most in times of natural disaster.

SNAP supports millions of Floridians in these jobs; filling a gap in income that allows them to feed their families and continue to play a role in our state's economy. To date, SNAP recipients in Florida between the ages of 18 and 50 who are not disabled and do not have dependents are limited to SNAP benefits for 3 months in any 3-year period when not employed or in a work or training program. In response to the

devastation of Hurricane Irma, your Administration ceased enforcement of this time limit for the months of September and October in the 48 FEMA declared disaster counties throughout the State. This move allowed the most vulnerable of Floridians to rebuild their lives without the worry of losing their SNAP benefit, and this policy must be continued.

Based on an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 35 counties and 8 cities are eligible for a waiver from this time limit due to high unemployment rates, exacerbated by Hurricane Irma. In the past, governors have pursued waivers in response to natural disasters such as major hurricanes, the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill, or significant layoffs by major employers. We ask that you continue this policy of lifting the time limit for SNAP recipients for a 12-month period in both disaster declaration localities, and counties that are experiencing high unemployment.

We appreciate the requests and actions you have already taken to ensure that all needs, particularly hunger and food insecurity, are addressed during this time of recovery. We look forward to working with you on the continuance of this policy and the waiver requests necessary to the USDA that will sustain Floridians looking for work, rebuilding their homes, and seeking nourishment during this time of hardship.

Respectfully,



Al Lawson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Darren Soto  
Member of Congress